

# ‘Disturbing’ teen mags put on newsagent’s top shelf



Hamdy Shahein inside his porn-free newsagent on Stoke Newington High Street

Beth Mellor

A NEWSAGENT known for campaigning against top-shelf pornography has turned his attention to the sexual content of magazines for teenage girls. Hamdy Shahein, 56, wants a legal minimum age to prevent young children from reading popular teenage titles like *Bliss*, *Sugar* and *Mizz*. Stoke Newington resident Mr Shahein said: “These teenage magazines are really disturbing. They give children the wrong idea about sex and are making them grow up far too fast – you can see the results of this in the rates of teenage pregnancy these days. “I would rather lose business than sell magazines I don’t agree with.” The newsagent’s comments come in support of a scathing attack on the magazine industry this week by the chief executive of the government’s consumer watchdog. The head of Consumer Focus, Ed Mayo, claimed that teenage magazines were responsible for the “early sexualisation of children” and branded the Teenage Magazine Arbitration Panel, the organisation charged with regulating the content of teenage magazines, a “toothless watchdog”. Mr Shahein said that he never allows pre-teen girls to buy magazines with sexual content in his shop, Hamdy’s Newsagent. “I will also now make sure that teenage magazines are on higher shelves and are not placed next to children’s comics,” he said. Mr Shahein, who has lived in Hackney for 26 years, said he also tries to educate parents about the content of the

magazines their children are reading. “Often these magazines have a cellophane wrapper over them, so parents can’t check the content before they buy them. It’s another gimmick that they use to push the boundaries with their content”. Mr Shahein hit the headlines in 2006 after winning a long-running battle with WHSmith over their distribution of pre-packaged selections of magazines. The policy, he argued, prevented retailers choosing which titles they sold. Over 500 shops are now members of Mr Shahein’s “porn-free” network. “I have been running this business successfully for 26 years – that’s proof that you don’t need to sell top-shelf magazines to make a living.” Annabel Brog, editor of *Sugar*, defended the magazine. “The average age of our readers is 14, nearly 15,” she said. “We have very little sex-related content but every single mention is in direct response to reader queries, for example answering questions on a problem page. “We do everything we can to help them say no to sex, no to bullying and no to extreme dieting, yet critics constantly quote headlines out of context and try to brand us as irresponsible. “Whenever someone accuses *Sugar* of running inappropriate content I always say: ‘Can you please show me where?’ Invariably they can’t.”

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### Hamdy’s quest for a porn-free Hackney

- Hamdy Shahein has organised a network of porn-free newsagents since 1989.
- In a battle with his magazine supplier, WHSmith News, to keep his shop pornography-free, Shahein eventually won an apology and offer of compensation from the company, which he says wrongly sent him hundreds of top-shelf magazines.
- Over five years, the newsagent collected around 1,800 magazines and newspapers sent by the company that he considered to be pornographic.
- Mr Shahein attempted to conceal the pornographic titles by placing them in large brown envelopes, with only the titles visible – an approach also adopted by some supermarkets.
- Mr Shahein has been named as the best neighbourhood newsagent in the Living London Awards by readers of The Independent and listeners of London radio station LBC.

## Did cab rapist Warboys strike in Hackney?

**Continued from front**

John Worboys met his ex-wife Jean Clayton in Hackney in 1991 at the Pickle Free House on Hackney Road, where she was working as a stripper. He was living in the area at the time. During his crimes, Worboys would entice his victims by offering them spiked champagne, telling them he was celebrating a lottery win and showing them a bag of cash. Worboys was allowed to walk free after police questioning on twelve occasions before he was finally caught in February 2008. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) is reviewing the investigation by police into one of the rapes, an attack which took place in July 2007. Deborah Glass of the IPCC said that there were “very specific concerns about this investigation.” Metropolitan Police have since changed their procedures for dealing with rape to ensure that all cases involving serious sexual offences are now reported to the Crown Prosecution Service.

## Kids take a shot with army rifle



CHILDREN tried out a replica AF80 rifle at a new army information centre in Dalston. More than 100 people turned up at the showroom in Kingsland Shopping Centre to learn about a career in the forces and try computer simulated combat. The event met with mixed reactions from the community, with Mothers Against Guns calling the centre an “absolute disgrace.” But the army has defended its decision to open the new showroom. Lieutenant Colonel Paul Meldon, who recruits for the London region, stressed that the gun used at the centre was “fundamentally different” from the weapons used in street crime.

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